

THE KENNEL, AND THE ECHO OF THE BREEDING

THE DOGS OF PHU-QUOC ISLAND

The director of the Zoological Garden of Acclimatization of Bois de Boulogne received a few weeks ago an interesting letter which we reproduce here and which is about the dogs of Phu-Quoc, of which Le Chenil has a picture of today.

"The three young dogs that I brought back and which are currently in the menagerie of the National History Museum, were born in Kratie (Cambodia, Haut-Fleuve), where I last resided.

"They come from a litter given to me, by a similar dog and bitch that I had been able to get during my stay in Hatien, three years ago before, when I fulfilled the functions of administrator of this district of Cochinchina.

"The male dog, born domesticated, had been brought from Phu-Quoc to Hatien by inhabitants of this island which belongs in the district of Hatien, and is located in the Gulf of Siam. It had been given to one of my predecessors and had passed through several owners before belonging to me.

"Very sweet, loves to be stroked, he was a good guard; and I had complete confidence in him and in his instinct to recognize friends of the household. The possession of this dog of uncommon strength, with extraordinary speed and stamina in the hunt, gave me the idea to look for a young bitch of the same breed.

"The desire I had to mate my Phu-Quoc dog increased in the face of the difficulties I had in realizing it. The inhabitants of the island told me that the race was disappearing, and that only a few remained, because the Annamites¹ had introduced ordinary dogs to the island which had crossed with the local breed.

"After two or three months of searching, a native whom I had asked to procure me a female, brought me a very young one, taken from the middle of the forest, and which was completely wild; she threw herself on all domestic animals and even on people. It took more than three months to tame her and make her sociable; after this time I was able to let her go free without fearing for people, but from time to time my old dog and the young female took revenge for the restraint imposed on them, strangling, silently, a miserable calf or an unlucky goat that I or my comrades were raising. Despite good and strong corrections, the wild and hunting instinct reappeared, and new domestic and wild victims followed the fate of the previous ones.

"These are the two animals, obtained by me during the various positions that I have held, gave birth to the young dogs that can currently be seen at the Menagerie of the Muséum, and who, although born in domesticity, have inherited the wild instinct of their primitive breed.

"Are these dogs from Phu-Quoc Island, as we are told? Or were they introduced from the mainland to the island? Did they cross the various branches of the sea that separate the various islands of the Gulf of Siam, mainland of Cochinchina and that of Cambodia?

This is a question that I have not been able to clarify, the Annamese never having been able to give me precise information on this subject. However, everything leads me to believe that this breed is an autochthonous² breed; and that if it is currently tending to die out and disappear entirely, this is due to the introduction of domestic dogs of another breed, which mixed with dogs originating from the island. What leads me to think thus is that in my numerous adventures across the vast uncultivated plains of Cochinchina and Cambodia, I did not meet anywhere on the mainland, wild dogs having this spike, or to put it better, the long fer-de-lance³ of hair that have the dogs that I have brought back have. On various occasions I have seen, and my comrades have met like me, in the forests or the vast grassy plains of Cochinchina, Annam or Cambodia, a species of wild dog resembling our wolf and that the natives call Con-cho-soi-rung or even Con-cho-sai-lang⁴, but these dogs had a coat resembling that of a wolf and bore no trace of the spike of upturned hairs which characterizes the dogs of Phu-Quoc.

"The Annamese of this island use these dogs or their products mixed with the ordinary Annamese breed as guard dogs and as hunting dogs. Very robust, with deep chests, of extraordinary speed and stamina, these dogs often leave the house to hunt on their own account, meeting in several, sometimes in quite numerous packs; they are not afraid, say the Annamese, of attacking even the largest animals, and mainly the wild buffaloes which are very abundant on the island and which, it seems, they take down very easily.

"One day when I went to Phu-Quoc Island to do a tour with the captain in charge of Régie's junk, I saw a young bitch of the species with which we are concerned, who had followed us, launch herself at a tall doe, and in less than ten minutes, force it to throw itself into the sea very close to us, jump in after onto the doe's neck and strangle it without difficulty a little ways from the shore.

"I also want to quote the exploits of a young bitch born of my male Phu-Quoc dog and of a French spaniel bitch that the Kampot telegraph operator had. From the crossing of these two animals were born several young dogs and bitches which all showed the spike of hairs against the grain on their backs; they had long ears and a much finer sense of smell than that of the dogs of Phu-Quoc, so they were all very good at hunting; a young bitch especially, without having been trained, guided by her instinct alone, often left the telegraph house, and, all alone, set out to

search the surroundings, hunting for a longer or shorter time. Sometimes she would bring home a hare that she had killed.

"Signed: Fernand DOCEUL".

The interesting letter which precedes gives us curious details on a breed of dogs absolutely unknown, we believe, until now. To us the dogs of Phu-Quoc are domestic dogs, while they sometimes live in the forest and could by this habitat and by the instincts which result naturally from it deserve the name of wild dogs, the whole of their conformation shows well that these interesting animals cannot be categorized as the various truly wild canines, wolves, jackals and foxes; they cannot even be grouped with dogs that have become wild again like the Dingo and brown dogs.

By the whole of their characters, by their forms, the dogs of Phu-Quoc are indeed domestic dogs. Let us add that they know how to bark, which dogs that are truly wild or have become wild again do not. They are about the size of a pointer, that is to say about 0.55 from the toe, and look like a greyhound with a slightly heavy head, or more exactly like a cross of mastiff and greyhound in which the influence of the blood of the latter variety predominates.

The dogs brought back from Indo-China by Mr. Fernand Doceul and currently visible in the menagerie of the Museum, are three in number: a male about three years old, a male and a female aged 8 to 10 months.

All three are short-haired and are more or less light in color, a little more colorful on the upper parts of the body than on the lower parts and limbs; the muzzle wears a more marked black mask in the adult male than in the other two. The skin will be strongly wrinkled in the older dog, slightly less in the young dog, almost not in the bitch. Straight, conch-shaped ears, boldly erect but poorly pointed. The nose is black, the eyes red, the paw well rounded, furnished with hard black nails.

The muzzle, quite wide, measures about half the total length of the head. The neck, very long, very supple, the body well made, the chest very deep, wide open, the belly remarkably like a greyhound, the pelvis wide, vigorous; well muscled thighs and arms. The tail, very mobile, furnished with a light brush in the adult male, is carried rolled up on the back, forming an arc of a circle accentuated enough so that its point comes almost to touch the back. The mouth, widely slit, furnished with powerful teeth and lips strongly tinged with black like the tongue.

Such are the dogs of Phu-Quoc. We would have said it all if it does not remain to speak of the peculiarity which distinguishes them from known dogs.

We know that in all animals, the hairs are implanted in the skin so that their tip faces towards the tail. At certain points, on the limbs, for example, spikes are formed; this is what we call the points on which the hairs change direction. In the dogs we are dealing with, the entire body hair is normally implanted, except on the middle of the back. There, runs a long spike which, starting from the loins, extends to the shoulders. This ridge, the hairs of which are identical to those of other parts of the body, is about five centimeters wide in the adult male, and only three in the other two specimens. The appearance of these hairs, the point of which looks at the dog's head instead of being turned towards the tail, will stop the observer, for it is an absolutely abnormal fact of which we know of no other example. Often we have observed differences in the nature, in the length, in the greater or lesser abundance of the hair of domestic or wild animals, but never this arrangement of the hairs in this variety, the hairs growing in reverse of what is normal.

It is a great desire to be able to breed in France the Phu-Quoc dogs and to obtain crosses with other breeds of dogs.

This is a very curious subject of study for naturalists.

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1 Vietnamese

2 Autochthonous: addresses the place of where the subject organism is originated and is likewise the organism found in that place

3 Fer-de-lance: a spearhead

4 Con-cho-soi-rung and Con-cho-sai-lang: 'con chó sói rừng' translates directly to "forest wolf dog" (con chó = dog, sói = wolf, rừng = forest) and con chó sài lang translates directly to "wolf dog" (sài lang is phonetic from Chinese 豺狼 meaning "wolf")

Source: gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k55720297/f1.image>

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